

The Written Account of the Generations of Esau 36:1 to 37:1

Moses edited and compiled eleven family documents in the book of **Genesis**. The major structural word for **Genesis** is *toldot*, which means **the written account of**, or *this is what became of these men and their descendants*. The noun is often translated *generations*, *histories* or *descendants*. After the section on the written account of the generations of Jacob from **25:19** to **35:29**, we have the tenth *toldot*, **the written account of the generations of Esau**. **The previous toldot told us about the establishment of Jacob, the son of promise, and the nation of Isra'el. Part of what became of Jacob was Esau; therefore, this tenth family document tells us about the dispensing of his non-seed line. Because he was Isaac's son, God would make him into a great nation, but he was not the son of promise.**

It is now clear that the last five *toldots* have a carefully constructed structure. The non-seed lines of **Ishmael** and **Esau** alternate with **Abraham**, **Isaac**, **Jacob** and **Joseph** to form *the line of blessing*.

The toldot of Terah (the Abraham narrative) 11:27 to 25:11

The *toldot* of Ishmael 25:12-18

The toldot of Isaac (the Jacob narrative) 25:19 to 35:29

The *toldot* of Esau 36:1 to 37:1

The toldot of Jacob (the Joseph narrative) 37:2 to 50:26

Like his brother, **Jacob**, **Esau** grew into a great nation, the Edomites. This is the fulfillment of **God's** promise to Rebekah when the twins were born: **Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated (25:23)**. The Edomites lived in **Mount Seir**, south and east of the Dead Sea, rather than **Canaan**. Thus, this *toldot* is the fulfillment of the patriarchal blessing given to **Isaac** in **25:23** and **27:39-40**. It also explains the future relationship between the nations of **Isra'el** and **Edom**. Like the two brothers, this relationship was often hostile; yet, there was always a sense of brotherhood just below the surface (**Deuteronomy 23:7; Obadiah 10-12**).

The role of **Esau's** foreign wives has been accented (**36:2-5**) in order to emphasize that **Esav** stepped outside of **God's** will. **His** genealogy also includes the detail that **his** descendants, like those of **Ishmael** before him, settled outside the Promised Land (see **36:6-8** and compare it to **25:18**). Having thus dispensed the non-seed line of **Esau**, Moses, the human narrator, is now prepared to follow the promises of **God** through the descendants of **Jacob**, which he will do in the last major unit of **Genesis**, the **Joseph** narrative.⁵⁴³